

## Message Text

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PAGE 01 CANBER 00047 030806Z

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ACTION SCSE-00

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 H-01 EA-07 PRS-01 L-03 SSO-00 /013 W

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R \*30655Z JAN 74

FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2259

INFO AMCONSUL BRISBA\*E

UNCLAS CANBERR\* 0047

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: CGEN, AS, US, PP

SUBJECT: WELFARE AND WHEREABOUTS:

GEORGE WELLER

1. SUMMARY: EMBASSY UNDERSTANDS FROM DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS THAT AUSTRALIAN EMBASSY, WASHINGTON, HAS RECEIVED INQUIRY FROM PAUL WELLER, RESIDENT IN BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS ABOUT WELL -BEING OF HIS BROTHER, GEORGE WELLER, CURRENTLY VISIT\*NG PAUPA, NEW GUINEA. FOLLOWING IS INFORMATION \*VAILABLE TO EMBASSY WITH REGARD TO GEORGE WELLER'S VISIT TO PAPU\*, NEW GUINEA. WE UNDERSTAND WELLER IS PROMINENT AMERICAN JOURNALIST, WINNER OF PULITZER PRIZE AND HAS RAPPORT IN INTERNATIONAL JOURNALISTIC CIRCLERS. HE IS APPARENTLY VISITING PAPUA, NEW GUINEA IN SEARCH OF STORY ABOUT WORLD WAR II COAST-WATCHERS. END SUMMARY.

2. EMBASSY RECEIVED SHORT CABLE DECEMBER 24, 1973, SIGNED BY GEORGE WELLER IN WHICH HE REQUESTED "BENEVOLENT INTEREST IN FREEDOM AMERICAN VISITING PNG." MESSAGE ALSO STATES VISITOR WAS "DETAINED, ASSAULTED AND ROBBED IN GOVERNMENTAL COUNCIL CENTER." EMBASSY IMMEDIATELY CONSULTED DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS FOR REPORT ON WELLER'S WELL-BEING. SINCE THAT TIME, WE HAVE RECEIVED THREE REPORTS FROM DFA WHICH INDICATE WELLER WAS NOT PHYSICALLY HARMED BUT THAT HE SUSTAINED LOSS OF SUN GLASSES AND POSSIBLY SOME PAGES OF HIS NOTEBOOK IN SCUFFLE WITH MEMBERS OF THE HAHALIS SOCIETY ON BUKA

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ISLAND. AUSTRALIAN REPORTS ALSO STATE WELLER WAS PREFERING CHARGES AGAINST MEMBERS OF THIS SOCIETY FOR RETURN PAGES FROM HIS NOTEBOOK APPARENTLY REMOVED DURING OR SUBSEQUENT TO SCUFFLE.

3. EMBASSY CABLED WELLER DECEMBER 29 ASKING FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT HIS SITUATION IN BUKA. WELLER RESPONDED ON DECEMBER 31 TO EFFECT THAT HE IS PREFERRING CHARGES AND REQUESTING AN AMERICAN "OBSERVER" AT FIRST HEARING OF HIS CASE IN BUKA SCHEDULED FOR JANUARY 3, 1974.

4. EMBASSY LEARNED FROM DFA WELLER HAS NOW APPARENTLY DEPARTED FOR RABAU. AUSTRALIAN REPORT AGAIN EMPHASIZES WELLER SUSTAINED NO INJURIES AS RESULT OF SCUFFLE BUT CONTINUES TO BE UPSET OVER THIS INCIDENT.

5. EMBASSY HAS AGAIN CONTACTED DFA JANUARY 3 TO REQUEST INFORMATION ABOUT WHERE WELLER IS AT PRESENT TIME AND IF POSSIBLE TO OBTAIN HIS ITINERARY FOR HIS VISIT TO PAUPA, NEW GUINEA. AT SAME TIME, AMCONSUL BRISBANE WILL TRY TO REACH WELLER BY TELEPHONE TO INDICATE OUR CONTINUED INTEREST IN WELLER'S WELL-BEING AND TO TALK PERSONALLY WITH HIM.

6. COMMENT: ACCORDING TO AUSTRALIAN SOURCES SCUFFLE IN WHICH WELLER INVOLVED RESULTED FROM HIS REFUSAL TO STOP TAKING WRITTEN NOTES OF CONVERSATION WITH JOSEPH HABIRIA, APPARENT LEADER OF HAHALIS CULT IN BUKA. NOTEBOOK REPORTEDLY FORCEABLY TAKEN AWAY FROM WELLER AND HIS SUNGLASSES BROKEN AT THAT TIME. AUSTRALIAN VIEW IS THAT CHARGES WELLER HAS MADE WILL NOT SURVIVE HEARING BECAUSE OF LACK OF WITNESS FOR PROSECUTION.

7. EMBASSY WILL REPORT FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS.  
HARROP

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NNN

\*\*\* Current Handling Restrictions \*\*\* n/a

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